

Amherst-Pelham Regional School Committee Meeting
Tuesday, March 11, 2014
Library, Amherst Regional High School

In Attendance:

Kip Fonsh, Chair
Michael DeChiara
Lawrence O'Brien
Debbie Gould
Rick Hood

Maria Geryk, Superintendent
Michael Morris, Director of Assessment & Evaluation
Mark Jackson, ARHS Principal
Sean Mangano, Assistant Director of Finance
Kathryn Mazur, Human Resources Director

Katherine Appy

Kathleen Traphagen (arrived @ 7:06)

Amilcar Shabazz (arrived @ 7:26)

Trevor Baptiste (arrived @ 7:26)

1. Welcome and Agenda Review

7:00 PM

A. Call to Order and Agenda Review

Mr. Fonsh called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and welcomed everyone to the meeting. He reviewed the agenda and asked if any member of the committee feels there needs to be any changes to the time allotted to each item. There were no changes to the times, but Ms. Geryk noted that Item 5B will only consider the FY15 Capital Budget.

B. Approve Minutes—Mr. Hood moved to approve the minutes of February 11, 2014. Ms. Appy seconded and the motion was unanimously approved with two abstentions. Mr. DeChiara moved to approve the minutes of the March 1, 2014 Four Towns Meeting. Mr. O'Brien seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

2. Public Comments

7:07 p.m.

Mick O'Connor, Pelham and ARHS parent, referenced a letter he submitted to the committee a few weeks ago regarding large class sizes in Algebra II Honors and other Honors classes at ARHS. He said that he received a response from Superintendent Geryk that was a genuine attempt to address his concerns about class sizes; however, he noted that his greater concern is around planning curriculum in a way that is responsive to the choices of the majority of students and parents.

3. Superintendent's Update

7:12 p.m.

Ms. Geryk distributed and briefly reviewed recent and upcoming events, including:

- The public forum to meet two finalists for the ARMS Principal position is scheduled to begin at 6:30 in the ARMS library on Monday, March 17;
- Athletes from the ARHS Boys and Girls Indoor Track Teams will compete at the New Balance National Championships in New York City on March 14;
- The ARHS JETS Team will be participating in competitions in the areas of science, math, computer science and writing throughout the month of March. This year's theme is *Engineering Tomorrow's Cities*;
- Nearly 30 MSAN Scholars are scheduled to lead Fort River 5th grade students in "Courage to Act" icebreaker and empowerment activities on March 18 as part of the Action Plan they developed at the MSAN Student Conference; and
- The UMass School of Counseling Education and Social Justice Education will be collaborating with a group of Chilean educators to focus on school violence in Chili, and ARMS faculty members Denise Boyd and Talib Sadiq are sharing PBIS information with them.

Ms. Traphagen congratulated the ARHS cast of *Shrek: The Musical* on an outstanding performance, noting that her entire family had a wonderful time. Mr. DeChiara expressed appreciation to Superintendent Geryk for the summary memos she has been providing the School Committee with their agenda packets.

3. Subcommittee Updates

7:15 PM

AEF—Mr. Hood reminded the School Committee that the Spring Sprint is scheduled for May 3.

Budget Subcommittee—There was no update to share from the Budget Subcommittee.

The Collaborative—Mr. Fonsh reported that the Board of Directors has completed contract negotiations with William Deal, the new Executive Director.

RSDPB--Mr. Fonsh reported that the RSDPB met after the Four Towns meeting on March 1st, noting that the group has been renamed "Regional Agreement Working Group" (RAWG). The new group will meet on March 19th.

5. New and Continuing Business

7:21 p.m.

A. FY15 Regional Budget Public Hearing

DOCUMENTS: Letter to Member Towns from Sean Mangano dated March 11, 2014; Revised Binder Pages 27, 28, 31, 32, 35-42, 141

Ms. Geryk noted that there will be a budget vote tonight, which is required to meet the timeframe for Town Meetings. However, she stated that some concerns were raised at the Four Towns meeting regarding the assessment method used to calculate the assessments to the towns. Ms. Geryk noted that the Five Year Rolling Average is the assessment that has been used for many years and one town has indicated that they may not be able to support use of that method. If that method is not approved, Ms. Geryk said it will have real consequences to the school budget. Mr. DeChiara spoke regarding Shutesbury's concern with the assessment based on the Five Year Rolling Average. He expressed appreciation for how receptive Superintendent Geryk, Mr. Mangano, Ms. Mazur and Mr. Morris have been to those concerns and for their efforts in finding at least a partial solution. Mr. DeChiara noted that Shutesbury town representatives hope to work collaboratively with the other towns to look at other potential alternative assessment methods for future budgets that may smooth the assessments for each of the towns over the years. Ms. Gould asked what the plan will be if Shutesbury does not approve the assessment method, which would automatically trigger use of the Statutory method. Ms. Geryk noted that it would require untenable cuts to the budget and would result in a complete overhaul of how the district operates. Mr. DeChiara noted that he wants to be clear that the Shutesbury leadership supports use of the Alternative Assessment method. They felt an obligation to share with the other towns that some Shutesbury residents are expressing dissatisfaction with using the Alternative Assessment since it results in higher costs for the Town. Mr. Mangano reviewed the two assessment methods, noting that using the Statutory Method would require additional cuts of \$1.6 million in addition to the \$400,000 in cuts that have already been made. Mr. Morris reviewed the potential impacts of that level of cuts, which would include a cut of 35-40 staff members; mandated study halls and reduced electives; reductions or elimination of non-mandated offerings, including after school programs, summer school programs, and athletics; and class sizes of 30+ at ARMS. Mr. Morris explained that this level of cuts has a cascading effect in areas such as students choosing to choice in or out of the district and eligibility for grant funding. Mr. Mangano reviewed the changes that have been made to the proposed budget to help reduce the assessment for Shutesbury. He noted that the changes reduce the budget increase to 1.7% instead of 1.8% and result in a reduction of \$23,000 for Shutesbury along with reductions in each of the towns' assessment. Mr. Mangano answered clarifying questions from the School Committee. *Mr. DeChiara then moved to adopt a budget of \$29,618,478 for the Fiscal Year 2015 for the Amherst-Pelham Regional School District and to assess member towns according to the assessment method specified in the Regional Agreement as follows:*

<i>Amherst</i>	<i>\$14,463,908</i>
<i>Pelham</i>	<i>\$1,261,955</i>
<i>Leverett</i>	<i>\$1,439,988</i>
<i>Shutesbury</i>	<i>\$1,568,902</i>
	<i>\$18,734,753</i>

Ms. Traphagen seconded and, after brief discussion and clarifying questions, the motion was unanimously approved.

B. FY15 Capital Budget Approval

Mr. Mangano briefly reviewed the FY15 Capital Plan that the School Committee is being asked to vote to approve. The vote on the FY16 Capital Plan will be delayed. Ms. Traphagen then read the following motion:

VOTED: That the District hereby appropriates the sum of \$994,000 for the purpose of paying costs of the following projects, including the payment of all costs incidental or related thereto: (i) High School Boiler Room Burner Replacements (2) in the amount of \$ 600,000; (ii) High School Science Dishwasher in the amount of \$ 9,000; (iii) High School Special Education Air Conditioning in the amount of \$60,000, (iv) High School & Middle School Security Cameras in the amount of \$ 200,000, (v) Middle School Locker Room Showers Renovations in the amount of \$ 15,000; and (vi) Middle School Pool Repairs in the amount of \$ 110,000, said sum to be expended at the direction of the Regional School District School Committee. To meet this appropriation, the District Treasurer is authorized to borrow said amount, under and pursuant to Chapter 71, Section 16(d), of the General Laws and the District Agreement, as amended, or pursuant to any other enabling authority. The amounts indicated above for each project are estimates and the Director of Finance may allocate more funds to any one or more of such projects, and less to others, so long as, in the judgment of the Director of Finance, each of the projects described above can be completed within the total appropriation made by this vote.

FURTHER VOTED: That within forty-eight hours from the date on which this vote is adopted the Secretary be and hereby is instructed to notify the Board of Selectmen of each of the member towns of this District as to the amount and general purposes of the debt herein authorized, as required by Chapter 71, Section 16(d), of the General Laws, and by the District Agreement.

Mr. O'Brien seconded and the motion was approved with eight in favor and Mr. Shabazz abstaining.

C. School Choice Vote

Mr. Morris briefly reviewed the rationale for continuing as a school choice district. Mr. O'Brien asked how many spaces would be opened in grades seven and 10. Mr. Morris noted that currently there would be 17 seats in grade 10 and six in grade seven, but that may fluctuate as enrollments change. After brief discussion, Ms. Appy moved that the Amherst-Pelham Regional School District remain a school choice district for the 2014-2015 school year and that the Superintendent or her designee be granted the latitude to determine the appropriate number of seats to open per grade level. Ms. Gould seconded and discussion followed. Mr. DeChiara stated that he believes the administration has done a thoughtful job with choice, but noted that he does not agree with choice philosophically so he will abstain from the vote. Ms. Gould noted that she agrees with school choice because she believes every family should have a choice of where their children attend school regardless of their personal finances. Ms. Traphagen agreed, noting that many families may choose a district through the school choice program based on a particular program or class that is offered in another district. Mr. Fonsh stated that he believes that school choice is very bad public and educational policy and he agonizes over his vote each year knowing that the district needs the money, but he cannot vote to approve something he finds morally reprehensible. After discussion, the motion was approved with five in favor, three opposed (Baptiste, Fonsh and Shabazz) and one abstaining (DeChiara).

D. 2014-2014 School Calendar Approval

DOCUMENTS: 2014-2015 Pre-Labor Day Start Draft

Ms. Westmoreland noted that the administration is recommending adoption of the Pre-Labor Day Start calendar draft, which is also supported by the APEA Executive Board and membership. Mr. Baptiste moved to adopt the 2014-2015 Pre-Labor Day Start calendar draft as the official calendar for the 2014-2015 school year. Mr. O'Brien seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

E. Policy Drafts for First Reading

DOCUMENTS: Policy AC: Commitment to Nondiscrimination and Educational Equity Draft; Policy ACB: Affirmative Action on Cultural Diversity Draft

Mr. Fonsh noted that the Policy Subcommittee is meeting on Monday, March 17 with the goal of finalizing a draft of the Wellness and Life Threatening Allergies policies for a first reading by the full committee. Mr. DeChiara stated that he believes the School Committee should make an intentional decision regarding the life threatening allergies guidelines and requested that it be included on an agenda before the end of the school year. Discussion followed regarding the policy drafts. For Policy AC: Commitment to Nondiscrimination and Educational Equity, Mr. DeChiara noted that the second sentence of the first paragraph seems too broad and suggested trying to narrow it down or define it more. For Policy ACB: Affirmative Action on Cultural Diversity, Ms. Traphagen noted that language is such an integral part of culture that she would like to see it included in the policy if possible. Mr. Baptiste noted that he had planned to bring wording for Policy ACB that would provide training through the Family Center for parents and community members from underrepresented groups to become paraprofessionals and teachers. He asked for feedback from the committee to guide his writing for the Policy Subcommittee meeting. Mr. Shabazz noted that, while he supports Mr. Baptiste's desire to see action on this topic, he believes that policy needs to be a broad, clear directive and this seems to fit more at the implementation level. Ms. Gould thanked Mr. Baptiste for putting ideas on the table to address this issue. Mr. Fonsh thanked the committee for their discussion and noted that the policies will be brought back for a second reading after the Policy Subcommittee meets.

6. School Committee Planning

8:47 p.m.

A. Calendar—Mr. Fonsh suggested holding off on canceling the April 8th meeting in case it is needed. Mr. Hood asked that the report on how the district is doing be added to the calendar before the end of the year. Agenda topics will include the new organizational chart in May and a PARCC/Common Core update (potentially on April 8).

7. Adjournment

8:56 p.m.

Ms. Appy moved to adjourn at 8:56 p.m. Ms. Traphagen seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

Respectfully Submitted,
Debbie Westmoreland